

THE DANCE OF ŚIVA AS PORTRAYED IN THE KUŪCITĀNGHRISTAVA OF UMĀPATI

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The Dance of Śiva has received relatively little scholarly attention. Coomaraswamy's brilliant essay, 'The Dance of Śiva' and Sivaramamurti's grand synthesis, *Naṭarāja*, along with several other important works¹ have brought out the essentials, but much work remains to be done before the place of the Dance within the history of Hinduism can be fully made known in English. With regard to Sanskrit poetry describing the Dance of Śiva, little has been done beyond the extensive citation and English paraphrase of such poetry by Sivaramamurti in *Naṭarāja*.

This paper is a brief examination of one important instance of such poetry, the *Kuūcitānghristava* of Umāpati. Umāpati is best known for his eight works on Śaiva Siddhānta, in Tamil, one of which, the *Saṅkappa Nirākaraṇam*, he tells he wrote in 1313 A. D. (*Śālivāhana sahitpāt* 1235)² and he is the author of the *Koyil Purāṇa*, a key text in the formulation of the Cidambaram legend of the origin of the *ānandatāṇḍava*.

The *Kuūcitānghristava* consists of 313 verses in the Śragdharā metre. The only printed edition is by K.M. Rājagaṇeśa Dikṣita, Cidambaram, 1958, with his own Tamil translation and notes. No manuscripts of this poem are listed in the *New Catalogus Catalogorum*. A Sanskrit com-

1 In addition to the valuable contribution made by Anne-Marie Gaston in her *Siva in Dance, Myth and Iconography* (New Delhi, 1982), mention should also be made to S. V. Charu, *The Divine Dancer* (Mysore, 1982), K.V. Zvelebil, *Ānandatāṇḍava of Śiva-Sadīṇṭtamūrti* (Madras, 1985), and K.C. Kamaliah, *Vision of the Sacred Dance* (Madras, 1987). For Śiva at Cidambaram a key work is H. Kulke's *Cidambaram Mūrti* (Wiesbaden, 1970); important discussion of the Cidambaram myths is provided by D. Shulman in *Tamil Temple Myths* (Princeton, 1980). A great desideratum for students of Dancing Śiva is the publication of T. Ramalinga Dikshitar's Annamalai University thesis, *A Study of Chidambaram and its Shrine as Recorded in Sanskrit Literature*.

2. According to the *New Catalogus Catalogorum*, Vol. 2, p. 393, three of Umāpati's eleven Tamil works are dated A.D. 1310, 1312 and 1313. The most recent account in English of Umāpati's Tamil writings (S. Arulsamy, *Saivism: A Perspective of Grace*, New Delhi, 1987) makes no mention of any dated text other than the *Saṅkappa Nirākaraṇam*.

mentary is said to have been written by Minākṣinātha (*Kuūcitānghristava*, Preface by V. G. Ramakrishna Aiyar, p. 23) but the editor makes no mention of it in his Introduction.

Umāpati is a key figure in the development of the Śaiva Siddhānta, and he is no less important in the history of the Cidambaram temple. As already mentioned, he is credited with the *Koyil Purāṇam*, which is an abbreviation and popularization of the Sanskrit *Cidambara Māhātmya*; he is also credited by some with the authorship of the temple's ritual manual, though this claims to be the work of Patañjali. Moreover, he is supposed to have donated to the temple no less than three objects of great liturgical significance: the crystal *liṅga*, the ruby *Naṭarāja*, and also the *ardhameru cakra*.

There is no direct evidence on these matters from the *Kuūcitānghristava*. Matters are referred to there which might have been expected to be in the *Koyil Purāṇam*, as for instance the ruby *Naṭarāja*, but their absence from that work is explained by its being a careful and faithful abbreviation of the *Cidambaramāhātmya*. With regard to the ruby statue, Ratnasabhāpati, Umāpati tells us in verse 16 of the *Kuūcitānghristava* that when the Dikṣitas were sent away from Cidambaram to Brahmā's sacrifice in *antarvedi*, Śiva created it from the sacrificial fire there so that they could continue to worship him. In verse 276, it is explained that the crystal *liṅga*, Candramaulīśvara, was created by Śiva from the nectar flowing from the crescent moon on his matted locks. But of course the explanations of the origins of these objects by no means rule out Umāpati being the donor of them to the temple. There is no mention of the *ardhameru cakra* in the poem, but Umāpati is most interested in the *Śricakra*; and the prominence of this *yantra* and the associated *Śiva yantra* is perhaps the most remarkable feature of the poem.

Umāpati's presentation of the Dance of Śiva is rich and complex. The title of the work gives no indication of the variety of its contents. Every verse concludes with the mention of Śiva's bended foot, but the verses as a whole are wide ranging, and deal extensively with the shrines, festivals and rituals of Cidambaram, general and local legends concerning Śiva. A series of verses is often likened in *Alaṅkāraśāstra* to a necklace, but the degree of variation of subject matter in Umāpati's poem is far greater than that found between precious stones, unless we allow also the variety of reflections to be found in cut-gems. In a sense the poem

reveals the mind of Umāpati to us in its choice of contents, in its perhaps unconscious structuring on the Dance of Lord Śiva, the poet divagates widely, his imagination flying out in many directions like the strands of Śiva's *jaṭās*. Analogous to this view of the structure of the poem is Umāpati's verse on the origin of *liṅgas*, verse 111 :

यल्लीलारब्धनृत- प्रसृतवरजटाजूटसम्मदवेग-

प्रोद्यत्स्वर्गपिगाम्भो-जनितकणगणा यत्र यत्र प्रपेतुः ।

तेषांसन्तत्र तत्र स्वजनिममुखरा मूर्तयः क्षेत्रराजे

तं देवं नन्दिमुख्यप्रमथगणवृत्तं कुञ्चिताङ्घ्रि भजेऽहम् ॥

When He playfully began His Dance

there proceeded from His twisted locks of matted hair

as they beat against each other with increasing speed

the water of the Heavenly River forming into droplets ;

wherever they fell

became an eminent place of pilgrimage (tutelary deity of a pilgrimage place)

and they turned into *mūrtis* such as *svayambhā liṅgas* ;

that God who is surrounded

by Nandi and other Pramathas and Gaṇas,

Whose foot is bent, I worship.

As is well expressed in this verse, Naṭarāja is the centre and cause of all other religious phenomena as far as the whole poem is concerned.

Every verse ends with *kuñcitāṅghriṃ bhaje'ham* // "I worship Him whose foot is bent." The wide ranging contents are anchored to Naṭarāja by this refrain ; indeed, in a sense it is this firm, not to say rigid, base that encourages the poet to range widely. The question naturally arises as to what part the foot plays in the rest of the poem. It is striking that the ardour of the devotee for the foot, so common in the *Tēvāram*, is otherwise to be found only at the end of the poem, where Umāpati makes a personal statement. He leads up to it, providing a kind of crescendo. In verse 300, human beings regret not worshipping Śiva's holy feet; not until verse 303 does he speak solely of himself in relation to the divine

feet. Personal statements oscillate for a while with verses about the devotion of others. In verse 311 devout Śaivas end by mingling with Śiva's foot. In verse 313 Umāpati declares that he continually drank in the wine of the lotus of Śiva's foot in the assembly; and as an afterword he declares that those who read his verses will ultimately attain the holy foot.

So much for the end poem, and the desired end for the reader. The only other fervent mention of the foot — the regular refrain excepted — is apropos the tearful devotion of Iyarpagai Nāyanār (214). In the opening verse Śiva's body is the universe, and his feet are in the south. Again as the cosmos, this time considered vertically, his feet are said to be in subterranean world of snakes (67). When Śiva is the origin of the world, in a verse that begins by stating that the moon arose from the lotus of his heart, we are told that the earth came from his feet (82). The castes too were created from Naṭarāja, and the Śūdras came from his feet (78). It is the raised left foot that is particularly important, and this is stated occasionally : this left foot is skilled in giving *bhukti* and *mukti* (64); it is raised to give his devotees what they desire according to *dharma* and the other ends of man (70); with his curved left foot he ever gives everything to those who bow down to it (108). In other verses, the foot gives only *mokṣa* : his drum gives *dharma*, his fire *artha*, his *abhaya* gesture gives *kāma*, the foot gives *mokṣa* (104); through the mere sight of his foot he gives the awareness of Brahman that is proclaimed by the Upaniṣad (83).

Having considered the refrain, let us now examine in detail the overall development of the poem. The poem begins with an emphatic and clear point of focus, on Cidambaram as the centre of the universe, and on Śiva dancing there. Verses 2 - 7 describe in detail the Citsabhā, and its allegorical correspondence to the universe. Verses 8-16 mainly refer to key incidents in the Sthalapurāṇa. Verses 17-26 deal with the rituals performed by the Dikṣitas at Cidambaram. Thus firmly grounded in the specific temple, the poem then expands its terms of reference. Māṇikka-vāṣagar, who is not mentioned in the *Cidambaramāhātmya* or the *Kōyil Purāṇam*, is referred to in 28, Pulkasa and Nanda, who are referred to in the *Cidambaramāhātmya* and other Cidambaram texts in 29, thereafter a running mixture of local legend, Purāṇic myth, often non-Śaiva reworked into Śaiva, notably in respect of Liṅga worship.

The most remarkable feature of the poem, from point of view of the worship of Śiva, is the stress that is placed on *yantra*. Śiva is conceived as dancing within *yantra*. Not only is the opening of the poem centred in Cidambaram, which is only to be expected from Umāpati, but the first two verses present Śiva as within the *yantrarāja* that is the heart of Virāj Puruṣa. But this *yantra* is upon the wall, and the wall is prominently mentioned in the beginning of the poem.

Naturally complementing *yantra* is *mantra*. A variety of *mantras* are referred to by Umāpati. I will not examine these passages here, save to mention that Umāpati refers explicitly to Śrīharṣa and the *Cintāmaṇi mantra* in verse 114: Śrīharṣa restores his dead mother to life with this *mantra*. Śrīharṣa's mother and father are both referred to by name; and Śrīharṣa refers to the *Cintāmaṇi mantra* several times in his *Naiṣadhacarita*. Śrīharṣa seems clearly to belong to the twelfth century. A *Cintāmaṇi mantra* is referred to in the *Cidambaraśeṭrasarvasva*, but bears no obvious relation to the *Cintāmaṇi mantra* referred to the *Naiṣadhacarita* and its commentaries.

If *yantra* and *mantra* are notably prominent, the Śaiva Siddhānta is remarkable by its absence. Umāpati is the last and the greatest of the Santānācāryas of the Śaiva Siddhānta. How are we to explain his silence in this respect? The general view of the Dance of Śiva, strongly influenced no doubt by Coomaraswamy's presentation, is expressed by V. Paranjoti in his book on Śaiva Siddhānta: "The importance attached to the dance of Śiva is due to the fact that it symbolises in graphic, concrete and dynamic form the religion and philosophy of Śaiva Siddhānta. Hence, the dance cannot be understood without the philosophy which it adumbrates in its movements. Love is the *motif* of the dance; the dance is love in its practical form."³ Certainly Umāpati's Sanskrit poem is imbued with love for Śiva, but what philosophy there is predominately Advaita Vedānta; and the Nāṭarāja is intimately connected with the Upaniṣads: they sing his praises, they describe his form, according to Umāpati.

There are one or two references to the Āgamas. The 28 Āgamas form the 28 pillars that support the Citsabhā (4); and in verse 107 we are told that Brahmins read out the *Kāmika* and other Āgamas to enlighten those who are outside the Vedas (*vedabāhya*). To be set against this are

3. V. Paranjoti, *Saiva Siddhanta* (London, 1954), p. 53.

more than thirty references to the Vedas and the Upaniṣads. Umāpati in his conclusion explicitly states that his poem of praise is intended to set forth the meaning of Vedānta (*vedāntārthaprabodhṛim ... stutiṃ*, 304), Śiva's actions are sung in the Vedānta (*vedāntodgītavṛtta*, 302; *caritaṃ yasya vedāntagītāṃ*, 311). Śiva it is who teaches Brahmatattva (e.g., 201 215). This teaching is explicitly connected with his Dance - pose: Śiva gives through the mere sight of his foot the awareness of Brāhman that is proclaimed in the Upaniṣads (*svasyāṅghryālokaṃātrād upaniṣadudita-brahmabodhaṃ prayacchan*, 83). Advaita is specifically referred to in verses 267 and 272; and Śaṅkara, referred to twice (88 and 295), is in latter instance said to be one of the Dikṣitas, born in Cidambaram.

It is generally accepted that Umāpati interprets Śaiva Siddhānta as the "essence of Vedānta" (*vedānta telivāṃ caiva cittāntattiray īṅku terikal urram*, *Śivaprakāśam*, 7.7-8) as S. Arulsamy notes in his assesment of Umāpati's contribution to Śaiva Siddhānta.⁴ But the almost total absence of Śaiva Siddhānta from the *Kuṅcītāṅghristava* remains to be explained. Either Umāpati changed his views at some point,⁵ or when writing Sanskrit *kāvya* he adopted a very different frame of mind. At all events, his wish to give Vedic authority to the cult of Nāṭarāja leads him to be economical with iconographical truth in so far as verse 108 claims that Nāṭarāja is described in the Upaniṣads:

वेदान्तोद्गीतरूपं ज्वलन्डमन्त्री धारयन्तं कराभ्याम्

अनाभ्यां डोलमुद्रामभयमपि यदापस्मृतो दक्षपादम् ।

विन्ध्यस्याकुञ्चिनेन प्रणमदखिलदं वानपादेन नित्यं

देव्या साकं सभायां रचयति नटनं कुञ्चिताङ्घ्रिं भजेद्भम् ॥

His form is sung in the Vedānta :

bearing the fire and the drum in two hands,

the swinging and the fear not gestures in other two ;

4. S. Arulsamy, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

5. Hoisington, in his introduction to his translation of the *Śivaprakāśam* declares that Umāpati was originally a Vaiṣṇava, but "became dissatisfied with the teachings of the Vēthic School, especially in reference to its modes of philosophizing He embraced the Śaiva philosophy as taught in the *Ākamam*" (*Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. IV. 1853-54, p. 127). But Umāpati is a fervent devotee of Śiva throughout the *Kuṅcītāṅghristava*.

placing His right foot ever on Apasmāra,
with His left foot slightly bending
He ever gives everything to those who bow down—
He performs His in the Hall accompanied by Devī.
Him, whose foot is bent, I worship.

A few other verses present the standard iconography of Naṭarāja. Thus verse 70 speaks of Śiva performing the Dance of bliss (*ānandanṭṭam*), with his right foot on the demon (*bhāta*) and his left foot uplifted, beauteous with its tinkling anklet (*śiñjanmañjiraśobham*), and worshipped by Brahmā and the other gods. Verse 64 gives the basic iconography, though omitting Apasmāra. Verse 93, in addition to the usual features, mentions the *prabhāvali*: He bears the host of gods and worlds in the lustre called the Oṃkāra (*oṃkāraṅkhyaprabhāvalīṃ surabhuvaṇagayaṇam...kṛtvā*). As is the case in the whole poem, Umāpati is extremely restrained in his use of poetic conceits (*arthālaṅkāra*): the only instance with regard to the description of the Dance is verse 220:

आविः स्मेराननस्य द्युतिभिरभिनवैः पाणिपद्मान्तराल-
प्रोद्यत्कान्तिप्ररोहैर्नभसि च रचयन् जालमह्नीं पतीनाम् ।
नव्यामम्भोदामलामधिवरणिहृत्वा पार्श्वगायाशिशवायाः
चित्रं यो नानटीति अनरनटनकुक्षितुङ्घिताङ्घ्रि भजेऽहम् ॥

Manifestly with the fresh rays of his smiling face
and the shooting radiance from the palms of his hand lotuses,
He forms a network of suns in the sky;
with the radiance of Śiva by His side
a novel garland of clouds on earth;
who thus dances intensely a wonderful [dance],
He who performs the dance of a bee:
Him whose foot is bent I worship.

The poet's gaze, steadfast though it is on Śiva's foot, constantly sees it in the context of Cidambaram while also looking beyond Cidambaram to wider spheres of myth and legend; these references to myth and legend make it unnecessary for the poet, except here and in one or two other

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verses, to see the Dance of Śiva through the kaleidoscope of *kāvya*, to break it up and refract it. Unlike for instance Ratnākara, whose poetry is so often referred to by Sivaramamurti in his *Naṭarāja*,⁷ Umāpati is deeply enmeshed in the worship of Śiva as Naṭarāja; for the Tamilian poet Śiva is at the centre of a universe modulated by and around Naṭarāja, and the poetry moves discursively from story to story, pivoting on the foot.

The final verse to be quoted in this brief account of Umāpati's poem is another instance of the Kavi's *līlā*. The white radiance of the foot so spreads through the universe that all those concerned with white things are inconvenienced (234). Here the screen of the poet's imagination goes white, and the discussion of the poem is here ended, though its richness demands much further study.

पादाङ्गुष्ठस्य यस्य द्युतिकवचितदिवक्त्रवालान्तराले
ब्रह्मा हंसं मुरारिः कलशगलनिधिं देवराजो गजेन्द्रम् ।
स्वं छत्रं वाजपेयो दिनकरशशिनी सैद्विकेयश्च शुक्लं
वर्णं शिल्पी नितान्तं मृगयति सततं कुक्षिताङ्घ्रि भजेऽहम् ॥

The whole circle of the horizons is protectively covered
by the radiance of His toes:
so bright is the white
Brahmā has to hunt for his goose,
Viṣṇu for the milk ocean,
Indra, king of the gods, for his royal elephant,
the *vājapeyin*, he who has performed the sacrifice of the drink of
strength,
for his white umbrella,
Rāhu, the seizing eclipse, for the sun and the moon;
Him whose foot is bent
I worship.

7. For a study of Ratnākara's poetry, see my *Ratnākara's Haraviṣaya : An Introduction to the Sanskrit Court Epic* (New Delhi, 1988).